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ABSTRACT

The three television networks, acting under severe restrictions imposed by the Iranian government, all provided comprehensive coverage of the hostage crisis. A study was conducted to examine what, if any, salient differences arose or existed in this coverage from November 5, 1979, until January 15, 1980. A research procedure combining qualitative comparative content assessment and ground theory was used to examine the running time of news stories originating from Tehran and eight subject matter categories: (1) the embassy takeover, (2) internal governmental affairs, (3) foreign relations, (4) economic conditions, (5) Iranian life and culture, (6) Islamic religion, (7) prominent individuals, and (8) outside forces affecting Iran. Videotapes of news reports were viewed twice to determine the amount of time of each report and its video information, and a third time to make an exact transcript to be used for data analysis. Results indicated that when networks were subjected to severe press restriction and behavior codes, the news items covered remained basically the same. Salient differences did exist, however, in pictorial and editing choices, running length of stories, writing, and reportorial styles. ABC delivered the most coverage, in short, fast paced reports and generally maintained a leadership role. (JL)

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AN ANALYSIS OF TELEVISION'S COVERAGE OF THE "IRAN CRISIS": 5 NOVEMBER 1979 to 15 JANUARY 1980

by

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AN ANALYSIS OF TELEVISION'S
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Television broadcast news is evanescent; it is this quality of broadcast news which challenges the broadcast journalist to report events as he/she observes them to the viewing audience. The ideal situation is this news events be dramatic, action-packed, colorful, and suited for video coverage. When the competition of evening network television news ratings means the difference of a million dollars for a network, there is a great premium placed on the best-produced news in prime time.[1] In 1981, the networks and the public watched the various shifts in news ratings. In March 1981, the lead had narrowed: CBS, 12.4; ABC, 11.2 and NBC, 10.9.[2] By September 1981, CBS had slipped to an occasional third place. During September alone, NBC led the ratings by one-tenth of a point over a second-placed ABC who was four-tenths of a point ahead of CBS.[3]

Broadcasters agree certain events elicit full comprehensive coverage. One such event is the crisis situation; the crisis provides the broadcaster an opportunity for the networks to "go out on a limb" and provide extensive coverage they might not otherwise do. The crisis, especially if it develops into an ongoing, continuous news event, can provide the impetus for in-depth, concentrated, intensive and even long-term news coverage. Broadcasting is a medium that has its own inner logic: brevity, simplicity, the quick summary and the vivid picture. By its very nature, broadcasting is impressionistic; thus, it has a limited capacity to deal with highly complex and technical matters, which often occur during a continuing news event.[4]

The events in Tehran, Iran in late November 1979 provided broadcasters with a story they could cover from a variety of angles. Immediate action was available to electronic news gathering services. On November 4, 1979, several thousand Iranians acted on the advice of the Islamic Republic Party; about four-hundred self-described students broke away from the chanting crowds when they neared the United States Embassy. One of the students quickly cut through the heavy chain on the embassy. Meanwhile, others students surrounded the embassy compound.[5] Elizabeth Anne Swift (who was to become one of the hostages), the deputy political counsellor of the embassy, phoned the Department of State in Washington; she reported the embassy was under seige by a "large mob of demonstrators, screaming anti-American slogans, and that several hundred of them had entered the chancery after climbing the wall of the embassy compound and removing bars from a basement window."[6] During the next several hours, classified documents and secret codes were destroyed by eleven Americans who managed to lock themselves in a vault while the other Americans and foreign employees were taken hostage. Shortly before 5 a.m. (E.S.T.) the eleven Americans surrendered and all telephone connections between Washington and Ms. Swift in Tehran went dead.[7]

For the next 444 days, some fifty-two Americans would remain in the hands of the Iranian students and the Iranian government. Negotiations between the United States and Iran continued during this time. Finally on Inauguration Day, January 20, 1981, the remaining hostages were releasted.

The events in Iran dramatized the potentials of satellite communications when coupled with electronic newsgathering. ABC was the first network to arrive on the scene; they arrived almost twelve hours after the takeover on November 5, 1979. Within four days, more than sixty staff members from ABC, CBS, and NBC moved through demonstrating mobs while they videotaped scenes of shaking fists, angry

Iranian faces, burning effigies, anti-American placards, and burning American flags. Producers of the nightly news in New York and Washington came to depend on a continuous supply of daily footage from Tehran and Qom (headquarters of the Ayatollah Khomeini.) As the 'crisis' developed over the next few weeks, Americans viewers not only saw the events unfold on the nightly news; they could also turn to thirty minute and hour long documentaries on the Iran Crisis. ABC even responded with a late evening news program they entitled "America Held Hostage."

The occupation of the embassy and the continual holding of the American hostages provided a preview to what reporting judgments a foreign correspondent, present in a troubled and politically volatile situation but accessible to television coverage, would make under these circumstances. For ten weeks, the American broadcast correspondents covered events in Tehran; on January 15, 1980, the American press, along with other western press, were informed by the Iranian government that satellite privileges had been cancelled and the American press should make immediate plans to depart Iran. NBC's John Chancellor reported on the evening news on January 15, 1980:

> This ends for now the most extensive press coverage of any revolution. Coverage which was full and fair but which didn't meet the needs of the revolutionaires who wanted us to tell it their way and threw us out when we didn't.[8]

PURPOSE FOR THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine what, if any, salient differences arose or existed among the three American commercial networks' coverage of events in Tehran from November 5, 1979 (the takeover occurred on Sunday, November 4) to January 15, 1980. In his study Deciding What's News, Herbert Gans concludes that " . . . by and large, the three network newscasts report virtually the same stories, but because they

compete with each other, there are also some differences."[9] A long term commitment of time, personnel, and money was invested by ABC, CBS, and NBC to bring a thorough coverage of the events in Tehran. If what Gans asserts is true, where and when do differences arise in broadcast coverage? What salient characteristics become evident in the coverage of a continuous news crisis event? Television, as it rarely refers to the past, calls upon its viewers to follow the running story. What news items, relating to the country to Iran as well as the crisis itself, did the networks choose to cover during the initial weeks of the coverage? In a news story, where many situations are equal -- the sharing of satellite time, Iranian press restrictions, governmental limitations on travel outside Tehran, carefully monitored movements of the broadcast journalists -- will there indeed be differentiation (major or minor) among the networks' coverage?

There is further justification for the study; it lies in the media criticism which resulted from the coverage of events in Iran. Since the "land of the peacock throne" began showing visible signs of internal conflict as far back as 1977, broadcast journalists found themselves taking notes, not only from the sidelines, but also being pushed into the spotlight. They were cast in a range of scripted parts which "have seemed to win them only catcalls and critical drubbing from every side."[10]

METHODOLOGY

The research procedure for this study combines qualitative comparative content assessment and grounded theory. Guba argues that a "naturalistic inquiry (qualitative) offers a more congenial and responsive mode of evaluation than any other practiced today.[11] Erickson describes the basic analytical strategy behind

qualitative methodology:

> What qualitative research does best and most essentially is to describe key incidents in functionally relevant descriptive terms and place them in some relation to the wider social context using the key incident as a concrete instance.[12]

Qualitatively-inclined researchers rarely assign numerical values to the observations but instead choose to record their data in the language of their subject(s). For this study, I compare the actual transcripts of the broadcast texts (as transcribed from the videotapes on file at the Vanderbilt News Archives, Nashville, Tennessee) from the weeknight editions of "ABC's World News Tonight," "The CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite," and "NBC Nightly News with John Chancellor." As in grounded theory methodology, a qualitative researcher, while being aware of existing theoretical framework of explanation schemes for the phenomenon under study, prefers the theory to emerge from the data itself. This "grounding of theory" enables the researcher to understand and therefore elicit an explanation of the phenonmenon which is consistent with its occurrence in the world.[13] By comparing where facts are similar or different, the researcher can generate properties of categories that increase the generality and explanatory power of the categories.[14]

In this study I examine two categories: the running time of news stories only from Tehran and eight subject-matter categories which were developed by use of grounded theory.

Videotapes on file at Vanderbilt News Archives, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee were studied in August 1980: again, I emphasize only broadcast news reports from Tehran were chosen for this study. The limitation was enacted for several reasons: first, Tehran was the location of the American Embassy and the scene of most action during the crisis; secondly, it remains the

seat of the Iranian government and the location of all governmentally-appointed news sources[15]; and thirdly, Tehran became a news bureau for all three networks and the point of origin for all satellite transmissions from Iran.

During the initial viewing I timed each report with a stopwatch and recorded the time. On the second viewing, I made copious notes on what video information was made available to the viewer. I also noted key words which described the video action. During the third screening, I made an exact audio transcript of the newscast. These were typed onto 5 x 7 notecards for research data analysis purpose. These transcripts became the data for analysis.

IRANIAN PRESS RESTRICTIONS

One essential element rarely discussed in the research to date on the coverage of the Iran during the embassy takeover were the extremely strict press codes that western and domestic correspondents and reporters were subjected to in Iran. On July 2, 1979, the foreign press affairs director for the Ministry of National Guidance, Ali Behzadnia outlined new guidelines which all western and domestic reporters would be subjected to. They included:

> . . . resident correspondents should renew their visas every two months rather than yearly; a cancellation of any visa over two months; a monitoring of all dispatches by Iranian consulates abroad and an evaluation of each reporter would be carried out before further accreditation of a visa would be granted. If reporters and dispatchers did not identify their sources within their article or their report, they would have to be disclosed upon demand. [16]

Two other recommendations were made at this time; if they were passed they would seriously limit objective reporting from Iran. They included:

> . . . Iran might insist that all correspondents use only officially appointed guides or interpreters. Secondly, it was possible that reporters, before leaving Tehran, would need official persons or guides accompanying them.[17]

To emphasize their point, Iran notified the Los Angeles Times that it would

not be permitted to send any correspondents to Iran.[18] Its correspondent David Lamb had been expelled from Iran on July 1 for "untruthful reporting on Iran" and for the "general negative tone" of the rewspaper on Iran. On July 23, Youssef Ibrahim, New York Times' bureau chief in Iran since trouble began in February 1979, was expelled for allegedly having filed false reports.[19] On August 6, an NBC-TV crew was expelled from Iran for no specific reason.

Three weeks later the Iranian government formally adopted the code. Included in this formally adopted code was a prohibition of reporters traveling outside Tehran without permission. Furthermore, reporters were not permitted to interview Iranians without a representative of the Ministry of National Guidance present at the time of the interview. Although the Iranian government said it would take some time before their code could be thoroughly enforced, correspondents were called to the ministry and informed of the changes. This official move was an attempt on the part of the Iranian government to silence anyone in a capacity of disseminating information about Iran, especially news that was not of a positive nature to the world.[20]

Later in the summer of 1979, the ministry announced another code; this was a 14-point press code -- even more severe and limiting than the previous one. It included a ban on unsupervised interviews with government officials and a requirement that reporters apply for a press card every three months.[21] New reporters arriving in Iran were required to sign a pledge card in which they promised to only report the truth and not to fabricate news or rumors.

The International Commission of Jurists went on record saying: "Iran's political life would suffer a severe setback because of the curbing of the opposition press."[22] Iran nevertheless did enforce this 14-Point Press Code. On September 4, Iran ordered the Associated Press to closedown its Tehran bureau

and withdraw its four correspondents. It accused AP of presenting a "distorted picture of the Kurdish uprising which provoked public opinion."[23] This action followed official Iranian charges that the "world's major news agencies with the exception of TASS, were headed by Zionists and that the foreign press was describing Iran as a dictatorship."[24] On September 5, Terry Povey of the Middle East magazine was told to leave[25] and on September 25, Ramachandra Moham, a correspondent for the Wall Street Journal, was expelled for having made "unauthorized contacts."[26]

FINDINGS: TIME

ABC was the first network to arrive on the Tehran scene. Bob Dyk, a London-based radio reporter for ABC News, arrived in Tehran on Monday, November 5.[27] When Dyk first arrived, there were fewer than fifteen foreign reporters in Tehran ard only one other American correspondent (Newsweek magazine). He and freelance camera operator Dave Green established their operation in the Intercontinental Hotel. The other networks however experienced problems entering Iran. Allan Smith, a London-based sound operator for ABC, said one of the problems was the ENG equipment. NBC and CBS hand-carried all their ENG as on-flight luggage. Although this is standard procedure, it made immigration officials nervous during the early days after the takeover. Smith said:

> . . . ABC's equipment went through as normal luggage so it was not even seen by the immigration people. Custom officials would assume it was alright because immigration had already let the people through.[28]

Iran also began limiting the entry of foreigners after November 5; they eventually eased their restrictions. However, because Dyk possessed the necessary visa, he was permitted into Iran; CBS and NBC, on the other hand, did not have

correspondents who held the proper visas; therefore, they could not pass through immigration. On November 7, John Bierman, an English stringer for NBC, filed his first report from Tehran. CBS did not begin filing reports from Tehran until November 9, four days after ABC and two days after NBC. In addition to the entry restrictions and visa problems, Time magazine reported that CBS and NBC hesitated sending their employees because of the danger factor. They quickly realized their mistake; over the next few days, five crews from CBS and three from NBC were turned away at Mehrabad Airport in Tehran. A producer in Iran estimated that each futile entry attempt cost each network approximately $16,000.[29]

It is important to note that videotape analysis of the first four days of the coverage reveals that both CBS and NBC did carry footage of the events in Tehran. That footage however was purchased by the networks from foreign news teams until they themselves were able to enter Tehran and shoot the events themselves.[30]

Or November 8, Martin Fletcher (NBC-TV) and Phil Til (NBC-radio) gained entrance. CBS also attempted but they were refused for security reasons.

By the end of the first week, only nine Americans correspondents were working in Tehran. However, by the second week, the networks had succeeded in dispatching their top foreign correspondents into Tehran. See Chart I for all correspondents and their reports from Tehran.

During the first ten weeks of the coverage, ABC aired a total of 138 reports, CBS aired 57, and NBC filed 67 reports from Tehran. That constituted for ABC, two hours, fifty-two minutes, fifty-two seconds of news reports; CBS, one hour, fifty-four minutes, twelve seconds; and NBC, one hour, fifty-one minutes, thirty-right seconds.

The number of correspondents also varied among the networks. The correspondents who filed reports from Tehran during this time period included:

ABC	CBS	NBC
Richard Anderson	Randy Daniels	John Bierman
Bill Blakemore	Morton Dean	Jim Bitterman
Greg Dobbs	Jed Duvall	Hilary Brown
Bob Dyk	Tom Fenton	John Cochran
Peter Jennings	Don Kladstrup	Jim Cummins
Jerry King	Arlen Ostrander	Rick Davis
Barry Serafin	Bert Quint	Martin Fletcher
Bernard Shaw	Liz Trotta	Fred Francis
Jack Smith	Hal Walker	John Hart
James Walker		Geroge Lewis
		Keith Miller
		Ike Seamans

Ten correspondents filed reports for ABC during the ten week study, nine were responsible for the coverage for CBS while twelve reported on events for NBC. (See Appendix A)

SUBJECT-MATTER CATEGORIES

Eight subject-matter categories were developed using grounded theory; these categories were used to compare the oral content of the news coverage. They were: the embassy takeover, internal governmental affairs, foreign relations, economic conditions, Iranian life and culture, Islamic religion, prominent individuals, and outside forces affecting Iran. Each news report was read and then divided into informational news items. These informational news items are different from the "news report." Informational items are bits of news information within a story. For instance, if the students held a news conference and displayed weaponry, photographs of the hostages, or played an audio tape, the news conference and all events within the news conference constituted one news item. When reporters questioned a governmental spokesman, all his responses were considered one news item. Interviews, regardless of the number of points covered within the context,

were considered one news item. For a breakdown of these informational news items by subject-matter categories, see Figures 1-8 (pages 29-36). An analysis of those items in each subject-matter category follows.

The Embassy Takeover

The significant portion of the coverage did center around events at the embassy, the hostages, the students holding the embassy, and involvement of various factors in these affairs. As Figure 1 reveals, the networks concentrated most of their attention on this aspect of Iran. However, within the networks, there were small but noted differences in what the networks chose to include.

ABC covered events at the embassy extensively the first week. The correspondents capitalized on their presence in Iran and reported on events around Tehran. Student news conferences were covered. When it arrived, NBC only noted the midday prayers, the presence of the Revolutionary Guards, and the overwhelming number of flowers around the embassy. Unlike ABC who was regularly covering student news conferences, NBC did not. One might assume they had not established their contacts with news sources at this point. By the second week, all the networks were firmly entrenched in Tehran and filing reports. They were also covering similar events; the Kevin Hemmering audio tape and student news conference. However, the salient difference arose in how often the networks aired stories about the news conference. On a given day, not all the networks would cover the same student news conference: for instance, on November 12 CBS and NBC; on November 14 only ABC.

During the third week, the networks emphasized the release of ten blacks and women. CBS was able to gain entry into the embassy on November 20; they became the first to do so. Tom Fenton was not permitted to talk with the hostages but he was able to communicate via handwritten notes to them.

CBS appears to have shifted its interest from the embassy to internal affairs and Iranian life during the fourth week (November 26-30). ABC, however, continued daily reports from the embassy. NBC was the only network to emphasize the new government leadership under Sadegh Ghotbzadeh would not alter student demands; they remained committed -- the former Shah of Iran for the hostages.

NBC was able on December 5 to establish phone contact with Bruce Laingen, charge d'affaires. NBC was the only network to agree to all stipulated conditions . . . for an interview with the hostages. Despite media criticism, NBC was able to interview William Gallegos; they aired the interview on December 10. ABC used some of the footage and attributed NBC with the footage; CBS did not air any portion of the interview.

ABC and CBS followed the issue of a hostage trial very closely. All the networks noted the widening gap between the Revolutionary Council and the students. All the networks agreed to all the conditions and aired a fifty-minute film on the American clergy's Christmas visit in 1979; although they differed in their voice-overs, the video portion was identical.

Internal Governmental Affairs

Only ABC carried any mention of the proposed Ramsey Clark November 7 visit. NBC noted that the Ayatollah Khomeini disagreed with the diagnosis of cancer on the former Shah. NBC also informed viewers that the Revolutionary Council and Khomeini were clearly in power after the resignation of Prime Minister Bazargan. ABC was the first to surmise that the government appeared to support the presence of the demonstrating crowds in Tehran.

During the third week, ABC did not carry any news item about the government. NBC did not broadcast a Khomeini speech in which he acknowledged the beginning of Moharram.[31] Only CBS carried an item on a November 22nd Khomeini speech in which

he praised the Pakistanis for their part in the burning of the American embassy in Saudi Arabia. News coverage of internal affairs escalated during the fourth week. The Bani-Sadr ouster was covered by all networks. Only CBS covered the Ayatollah Khalkhali visit to Qom on November 29.

ABC and CBS carried the results of the constitutional voting referendum on December 3; ABC provided a full breakdown of events and also did a follow-up story later in the week. ABC highlighted the compositional breakdown of the Revolutionary Council. NBC's coverage was limited the first week of December.

NBC did offer a feature the other networks never did cover; they covered a judicial trial where a former Shah official was on trial. This gave the American viewer a feeling for an Islamic trial: the type of trial the American hostages would be subjected to if they were to stand trial. ABC and NBC carried stories on the Mofateh assassination. By the end of December, internal affairs were sparsely covered by the networks. ABC carried a news item on the trouble in Tabriz where shooting had been reported.

Secretary-General of the United Nations Kurt Waldheim visited Iran the first week of January. All the networks carried stories about the conspiracy plot against his life.

All the networks noted ethnic disturbances; however, when NBC and CBS attempted to cover them from the scene in Tabriz, they were either sent away before they could cover the story or they were limited from satellite transmission.

Foreign Relations

Although ABC was the first network to arrive on the scene, NBC was the first network to note that the Iranian people were firmly against the former Shah even ten months after his departure. Furthermore, NBC carried a news item on the PLO

and the bonds of friendship between the two countries and their viewpoints on the embassy takeover.

During the second week, ABC began covering foreign affairs. On November 11, they aired a report which said the United States was talking about cutting off all foodstuffs to Iran; it was the only network to air this. Both ABC and CBS outlined the three-step proposal which the Iranian government said would open negotiations.

CBS covered the Ramsey Clark letter. NBC mentioned that several government leaders recommended seeking United Nations assistance in breaking down the impasse. ABC highlighted that Iran was not concerned about the U.S. deployment of naval warships in the Persian Gulf.

CBS was the first network to cover the purported Kennedy letter. ABC ran a lengthy story later. ABC was the only network to mention that the Soviet embassy in Tehran had lodged a protest against the student holding of the American hostages. ABC and NBC aired comments by the Revolutionary Council on the Soviet invasion into Afghanistan at the end of December. CBS followed on December 28 with the story. Only NBC mentioned that House of Representative George Hansen was back in town December 28.

Foreign relations coverage escalated during the first week of January when Waldheim arrived.

Economic Conditions

As Figure 4 illustrates, the networks did not cover many items in this category. Three major properties surfaced within this category: oil, Iranian assets, and U.S. economic trade sanctions. Coverage concentrated on these three items when either government made an announcement to ban the import of oil, the decision to boycott American banks, etc. Each network did offer news items on

on the investigation by the Central Bank into the royal Pahlavi family. Each network did air at least one feature story on the effects of the economic boycott on Iran.

Iranian Society and Its People

News items that fell under this category were covered extensively during the first six weeks. During the first six week, the demonstrations were huge in size, occurred every Friday and often several times during the week, and were anti-American in nature. However, by December 10, the correspondents were relying less on the massive demonstrations and more on events within the embassy. Crowds sizes were decreasing and the networks noted this. CBS offered fewer news items overall in this category.

The networks did note the period of Moharram and the relationship of Moharram to the anti-American demonstrations.

Islamic Religion

As Figure 6 shows, there was little coverage by any of the networks of this subject matter category. All the networks marked the beginning of the Islamic New Year and the observance of Moharram. The networks did single out the self-flagellation aspect of this commemoration.

Prominent Individuals

This category was developed to include any feature-type story or background information the correspondents might provide during the coverage of events in Iran. Media criticism resulting from the coverage led readers to believe that all the networks talked the Ayatollah Khomeini and Sadegh Ghotzbadeh. Analysis of the news stories broadcast from Tehran reveal just the opposite. At no time did the correspondents offer any full length feature story on any character or personality in Iran. One or two line descriptive phrases, such as "a hardliner," a "more

moderate," a "nice guy," or he "remains firm in his convictions" were occasionally used to described Bani-Sadr, Ghotbzadeh and Khomeini. However, the networks did not carry feature stories during the evening news of any prominent individual.

Despite the anti-Shah expressions by the Iranian people and government, Tehran-based correspondents offered few comments on the royal family. This could be attributed to the fact that the royal family no longer resided in Iran.

Waldheim did receive some specific coverage. This was due in part to the Iranian media's coverage of the U.N. chief; they dubbed him pro-western and a puppet of President Carter.

Outside Forces Affecting Iran

This subject-matter category was developed to include stories about the western media, unofficial personnel, and/or events that affected Iranian life and events in Iran. Noted differences and/or similarities among the networks were minor. NBC informed its viewers on November 12 that approximately two-thousand Americans still resided in Iran. ABC featured an interview with the director of the Iran-American Chamber of Commerce on November 15. All three networks reported on the NBC film crew arrest on November 15. Only CBS carried any story on the Americans still living in Tehran; CBS spent Thanksgiving with them.

ABC carried two significant news items on November 22; Abol Sadegh of the Ministry of National Guidance met with western journalists and delivered a lecture on their reporting style. At this time, Bani-Sadr talked with the correspondents and encouraged they to meet, discuss the crisis and offer solutions. Correspondents called it "TV diplomacy." Only ABC carried these two items.

NBC featured on November 23 a friendly march in which foreign residents (including Americans) demonstrated their support for the Iranian cause.

ABC was the only network to note the presence of a group identified as "Americans in support of the U.S. Embassy Seizure."

Both CBS and NBC reported on the Palestinians who continued to occupy the Tehran airport. Neither network explained in any great detail why they were there or what they hoped to gain by traveling to South Lebanon.

Liz Trotta filed a feature story on external news information source (Radio Moscow, the BBC, and VOA) and how Iranian people received their news.

By the first week of January, correspondents had sensed an air of displeasure by the Iranian government in how they were covering events in Iran. They were accused of not emphasizing the "good will gesture" on the part of the government to allow American clergy to visit the hostages during Christmas. On January 4, CBS was denied satellite time because of a Marvin Kalb story from Washington where he reported that Ghotbzadeh had accused Khomeini of being a "fool."

By the ninth and tenth weeks, all the networks had suffered at least once governmental interference in video transmission (Jan. 4, 5. and 6). ABC carried reports that the Iranian government had banned CBS and NBC from satellite usage on January 3 and 10 respectively. NBC reported that George Lewis was arrested in Qom on January 7 and that eight NBC reporters had been expelled from Tabriz on January 10.

By January 14, it was evident that the American days in Iran were numbered. On the 15th, the three networks carried only audio reports because satellite transmission facilities were closed to them. All the networks covered that story -- the news blackout.

Conclusions

There existed measurable differences among the three networks' coverage of events in Iran when examining the amount of time each devoted to on-air reports from Tehran. ABC broadcast 139 reports for a total of two hours, fifty-two minutes, fifty-two seconds or 63.8 percent of the total time of running reports for all three

networks from Tehran (six hours, thirty-eight minutes, forty-two seconds.) CBS had one hour, fifty-four minutes, twelve seconds or 18.2 percent while NBC had one hour, fifty-one minutes, thirty-eight seconds for 17.8 percent.

ABC was able in the first five days after the takeover to gain a marked advantage over its competition. From November 5-9, ABC filed eleven minutes, five seconds of reports to CBS' two minutes and NBC's five minutes, eighteen seconds; percentage wise, that meant 60.2 percent for ABC, 10.8 percent for CBS and 28.8 percent for NBC.

NBC had the greatest number of correspondents in operations during the first ten weeks of the coverage; they had twelve to ABC's ten and CBS' nine. The number of correspondents however does not appear in this particular instance to affect the amount of total broadcast time or the number of stories by a network. ABC utilized ten correspondents to cover 139 reports for 63.8 percent of the total time whereas NBC employed twelve for 17.8 percent of the total running time. CBS had nine correspondents for their 18.2 percent. While CBS and NBC differ by only three minutes in their respective total running time, there was a significant difference in the number of correspondents utilized by each network to cover those three minutes.

By the conclusion of the first week, all the networks had a correspondent in Tehran: Bob Dyk for ABC, Arlen Ostrander for CBS, and John Bierman (only a stringer) for NBC and Martin Fletcher (NBC). NBC was the first network to begin multiple reports on a given night from Tehran (November 9). As Time noted, by the second week all the networks had top correspondents on the scene. Dyk was joined by Jerry King and Peter Jennings (ABC made the decision to move Jennings from London and base him in Tehran.) Randy Daniels and Tom Fenton reported for CBS while George Lewis and John Hart were onboard for NBC.

A pattern emerged with CBS and NBC. Rarely on a Monday evening would a new correspondent begin filing reports. (There were exceptions: November 19, Don Kladstrup for CBS and December 24, John Cochran for NBC.) Instead, when there was a turnover in on-air correspondents, they would be assimilated into the production midweek. One could posit that this would ensure a continuity of reporting formats and allow the correspondents to gain some familiarity with the continuing news crisis sotry and participants in the crisis.

ABC also had new correspondents on the scene. Unlike CBS and NBC, there was a difference in their format. Anchor Peter Jennings began reporting on November 14 and stayed through December 11 (almost a month.) He was replaced by Barry Serafin on December 12; he acted as anchor in Tehran until Jennings returned on January 3, 1980. Both of these correspondents gave a sense of continuity by their presence every night in Tehran. TV Guide noted that ABC "upped the ante" when it chose to send Jennings to co-anchor their nightly edition of the news." [32]

Examination of the news scripts reveal that all three networks concentrated most heavily on events at the embassy or events related to the embassy takeover and the hostages. Governmental affairs received significant coverage when power conflicts between governmental officials developed or a religious power struggle occurred: Shariat-Madari and Khomeini. Storeis in this category also increased when a conflict arose between the Revolutionary Council and the students. An increase was also seen during ethnic disturbances (early January 1980) and during the voting on the constitutional referendum. Although there were many stories about the Revolutionary Council, many of its involvements were connected to events at the embassy; therefore those stories were included in the category of embassy takeover.

The category of "Outside Forces" did receive noted attention; however, it was concentrated at times when western newsmen were arrested, detained, or banned from satellite time by the Iranian government.

The coverage of events in Tehran during this time span facilitated both video and audio coverage. Events were colorful, dramatic, filled with action and motion, and had well-defined characters who lent themselves to video coverage. One might argue it was the protagonist versus the antagonist; from all appearance, the protagonist might lose out. This continuing news crisis story was best covered on location: direct broadcast satellite overage and ENG equipment brought the coverage directly into American homes. The networks invested time, personnel and money; whether they deliberately chose to do this is unclear. ABC consistently maintained high visibility in its concern for complete coverage. Under the tutelage of Roone Arledge, ABC had begun to establish a new image in news reporting and therefore, through its coverage, ABC gained increased attention from television viewers. ABC was prepared to react quickly to major events: Arledge had prepared his staff in mid-1979; he required visas and proper clearance to enter various troubled areas. One such area was Iran.

By its mere presence in Iran, ABC took a leadership role. This is not to say that CBS and NBC did not attempt a thorough coverage of events in Tehran and Iran; they did; however, it was not to the magnitude that ABC did. ABC broadcast almost three times the number of reports than either CBS or NBC. ABC's stories were generally shorter in length and therefore, the newscasts from Tehran tended to be faster paced with more reports than either CBS or NBC. CBS and NBC had longer reports and fewer of them. Although NBC had the greatest number of reporters, they did not appear to have the wide aspect of coverage that ABC did.

Significant surges in news coverage occured after important "dramatic" news events in Tehran; as the number of news stories increased, the reports became notably longer and filled with greater detail. During slack periods, network

correspondents tended to fill or "pad" their reports with feature material; students learning how to handle weapons, life on the streets of Tehran, and the effects of the trade sanctions. Whether or not the correspondents felt obligated to show another side of Tehran or not, they did make an effort of a few occasions to show that not every Iranian was anti-American and that life continued in Tehran in a normal fashion. What is evident, however, is the networks would not relinquish time or reports from Tehran even during slack periods. They remained on the scene; I posit, even continuing to perpetrate news. Once that initial investment had been made, producers expected news.

In conclusion, when networks are subjected to severe press restrictions and press behavior odes -- where movement is limited and news sources are designated -- the news items covered will remain basically the same. Salient differences will arise in pictorial and editing choices, running length of stories, writing, and reportial styles.

APPENDIX A

The number of news reports, length of those reports, and the network correspondents who filed reports for ABC, CBS, and NBC: November 5, 1979 to January 15, 1980.

DATE	ABC	REPORT LENGTH	CBS	REPORT LENGTH	NBC	REPORT LENGTH
Nov. 5	Bob Dyk	1:45				
Nov. 6	Bob Dyk	1:38				
Nov. 7	Bob Dyk	1:37			John Bierman	1:50
Nov. 8	Bob Dyk	3:21			John Bierman	1:03*
Nov. 9	Bob Dyk	2:44	Arden Ostrander	2:00	Martin Fletcher	1:25
					John Bierman	1:00
Nov. 12	Jerry King	1:55	Randy Daniels	2:56	George Lewis	2:21
	Bob Dyk	2:45				
Nov. 13	Bob Dyk	2:01	Randy Daniels	2:35	George Lewis	1:23
	Jerry King	1:48			Martin Fletcher	2:00
Nov. 14	Peter Jennings	:40	Randy Daniels	1:33	Martin Fletcher	1:33
	Bob Dyk	2:33			George Lewis	1:43
	Peter Jennings	:15				
	Jerry King	2:08				
Nov. 15	Peter Jennings	:49	Tom Fenton	2:27	Martin Fletcher	2:46**
	Bob Dyk	2:03			John Hart	2:11
	Peter Jennings	1:57				

* audio report only
** NBC crew arrested for videotaping embassy.

APPENDIX A - Continued

DATE	ABC		CBS		NBC	
Nov. 16	Peter Jennings	:43	Tom Fenton	2:36	Martin Fletcher	2:30
	Bob Dyk	2:00				
	Peter Jennings	:45				
Nov. 19	Peter Jennings	1:01	Don Kladstrup	2:35	George Lewis	2:46
	Bob Dyk	3:07	Tom Fenton	2:11		
	Peter Jennings	:37				
Nov. 20	Peter Jennings	2:07	Don Kladstrup	1:43	John Hart	2:06
	Peter Jennings	:55	Tom Fenton	4:07	Martin Fletcher	1:11
	Bob Dyk	1:05			George Lewis	2:36
Nov. 21	Peter Jennings	:52	Randy Daniels	1:19	Keith Miller	1:21
	Bob Dyk	3:11	Tom Fenton	1:34	John Hart	3:03
	Peter Jennings	:24				
	Jerry King	2:03				
Nov. 22	Peter Jennings	1:48	Tom Fenton	2:13		
			Don Kladstrup	2:14		
Nov. 23	Peter Jennings	:34	Tom Fenton	2:26	Keith Miller	1:27
	Jerry King	2:08			George Lewis	1:52
	Peter Jennings	1:29				
Nov. 26	Peter Jennings	:40	Tom Fenton	2:16	George Lewis	2:40
	Bob Dyk	2:20				
Nov. 27	Peter Jennings	:56	Tom Fenton	1:57	Jim Cummings	1:13
	Bob Dyk	2:18	Jed Duvall	1:49	George Lewis	1:23
			Don Kladstrup	3:06		
Nov. 28	Peter Jennings	1:18	Tom Fenton	2:40	Jim Cummings	1:30
	Richard Anderson	1:03	Don Kladstrup	2:12	George Lewis	1:35
	Peter Jennings	2:36				

APPENDIX A - Continued

DATE	ABC		CBS		NBC	
Nov. 29	Peter Jennings	1:40	Tom Fenton	1:52	George Lewis	1:46
	Richard Anderson	1:49			Jim Cummings	1:01
	Peter Jennings	:50				
Nov. 30	Peter Jennings	2:54	Tom Fenton	1:46	Rick Davis	1:22
	Peter Jennings	:19			Jim Cummings	1:21
	Jerry King	1:23				
	Peter Jennings	:29				
	Bernard Shaw	1:36				
	Peter Jennings	:40*				
Dec. 3	Peter Jennings	:29	Tom Fenton	2:23		
	Bob Dyk	1:42				
	Peter Jennings	2:20				
Dec. 4	Peter Jennings	:22	Tom Fenton	1:14	George Lewis	1:47
	Bob Dyk	1:25				
	Peter Jennings	3:08				
Dec. 5	Peter Jennings	1:40	Morton Dean	1:32	Hilary Brown	1:27
	Bob Dyk	:36**				
Dec. 6	Peter Jennings	:17	Morton Dean	2:49	Fred Francis	1:40
	Peter Jennings	1:04			George Lewis	2:23
	Peter Jennings	:25			Hilary Brown	2:39
	Richard Anderson	1:40				
	Peter Jennings	:54				
	Jerry King	1:10				

* Report interrupted.
** Temporary loss of video/audio.

APPENDIX A - Continued

DATE	ABC		CBS		NBC	
Dec. 7	Peter Jennings	:23	Morton Dean	2:03	Hilary Brown	2:02
	Bernard Shaw	1:20				
	Peter Jennings	:20				
	Peter Jennings	:20				
	Peter Jennings	:07				
	Peter Jennings	1:03				
Dec. 10	Peter Jennings	:33	Morton Dean	1:53	George Lewis	2:44*
	Peter Jennings	:23				
	Bill Blakemore	1:38				
Dec. 11	Peter Jennings	:53	Morton Dean	1:45	George Lewis	1:33
	Richard Anderson	1:54				
	Peter Jennings	:56				
Dec. 12	Barry Serafin	:50	Morton Dean	1:35	Hilary Brown	:56
	Bill Blakemore	:47			Rick Davis	1:21
	Barry Serafin	1:03				
Dec. 13	Barry Serafin	:32	Morton Dean	2:33	Hilary Brown	2:40
	Barry Serafin	:16				
	Barry Serafin	:20				
Dec. 14	Barry Serafin	:40				
	Bernard Shaw	2:00				
	Barry Serafin	1:06				
Dec. 17	Barry Serafin	:17	Morton Dean	1:03	Rick Davis	1:30
	Jack Smith	1:25	Liz Trotta	1:32	Jim Bitterman	1:40

*William Gallegos interview aired this evening.

APPENDIX A - Continued

DATE	ABC		CBS		NBC	
Dec. 18	Barry Serafin	:19	Morton Dean	1:39	Rick Davis	1:31
	Greg Dobbs	1:55			George Lewis & Jim Bitterman	1:20*
	Barry Serafin	1:13				
Dec. 19	Barry Serafin	1:13	Morton Dean	1:16		
			Liz Trotta	:22		
Dec. 20	Barry Serafin	:45	Morton Dean	:55	George Lewis	1:45
	Jack Smith	1:09	Liz Trotta	1:14		
	Barry Serafin	:25				
	James Walker	1:17				
	Barry Serafin	:24				
Dec. 21	Barry Serafin	:48			Jim Bitterman	1:34
	Barry Serafin	2:01				
	James Walker	1:20				
	Barry Serafin	:13				
Dec. 24	Barry Serafin	:46	Liz Trotta	:50**	John Cochran	2:24
	Jack Smith	1:11	Bert Quint	1:54		
	Barry Serafin	:12				
	Bill Blakemore	1:28				
	Barry Serafin	:33				
Dec. 25	Barry Serafin	1:38	Bert Quint	2:27		
	Bill Blakemore	4:05	Hal Walker	1:52		
	Barry Serafin	:14				
	James Walker	:38				
Dec. 26	Barry Serafin	2:19	Bert Quint	2:18	George Lewis	2:16
	Bill Blakemore	1:54	Hal Walker	3:00	John Cochran	1:21
					George Lewis & John Cochran	1:23*

**Audio report

*Iran Diary

APPENDIX A - Continued

DATE	ABC		CBS		NBC	
Dec. 27	Barry Serafin	:39	Bert Quint	2:27	Jim Bitterman	1:23
	Barry Serafin	:24				
	James Walker	1:58				
	Barry Serafin	:22				
Dec. 28			Bert Quint	1:40	Jim Bitterman	1:46
					John Cochran & George Lewis	1:21*
Dec. 31	Barry Serafin	:15	Liz Trotta	3:29	Jim Bitterman	1:27
	Jack Smith	1:26			George Lewis	4:14
	Barry Serafin	2:58				
Jan. 1	Barry Serafin	:19	Bert Quint	2:11		
	Jack Smith	1:47	Liz Trotta	1:31		
	Barry Serafin	:14				
	Bill Blakemore	1:14				
	Barry Serafin	:37				
Jan. 2	Barry Serafin	:14	Bert Quint	1:58	John Cochran	1:40
	Bob Dyk	1:40				
	Barry Serafin	:07				
	Jack Smith	1:03				
Jan. 3	Peter Jennings	:32	Bert Quint	2:27	John Cochran	1:37
	Bob Dyk	1:39			George Lewis & John Cochran	1:09*
Jan. 4	Peter Jennings	:42	Bert Quint	1:12**	Ike Seamans	:55
	Peter Jennings	2:06			John Cochran & George Lewis	1:23*

**Audio only

*Iran Report

APPENDIX A - Continued

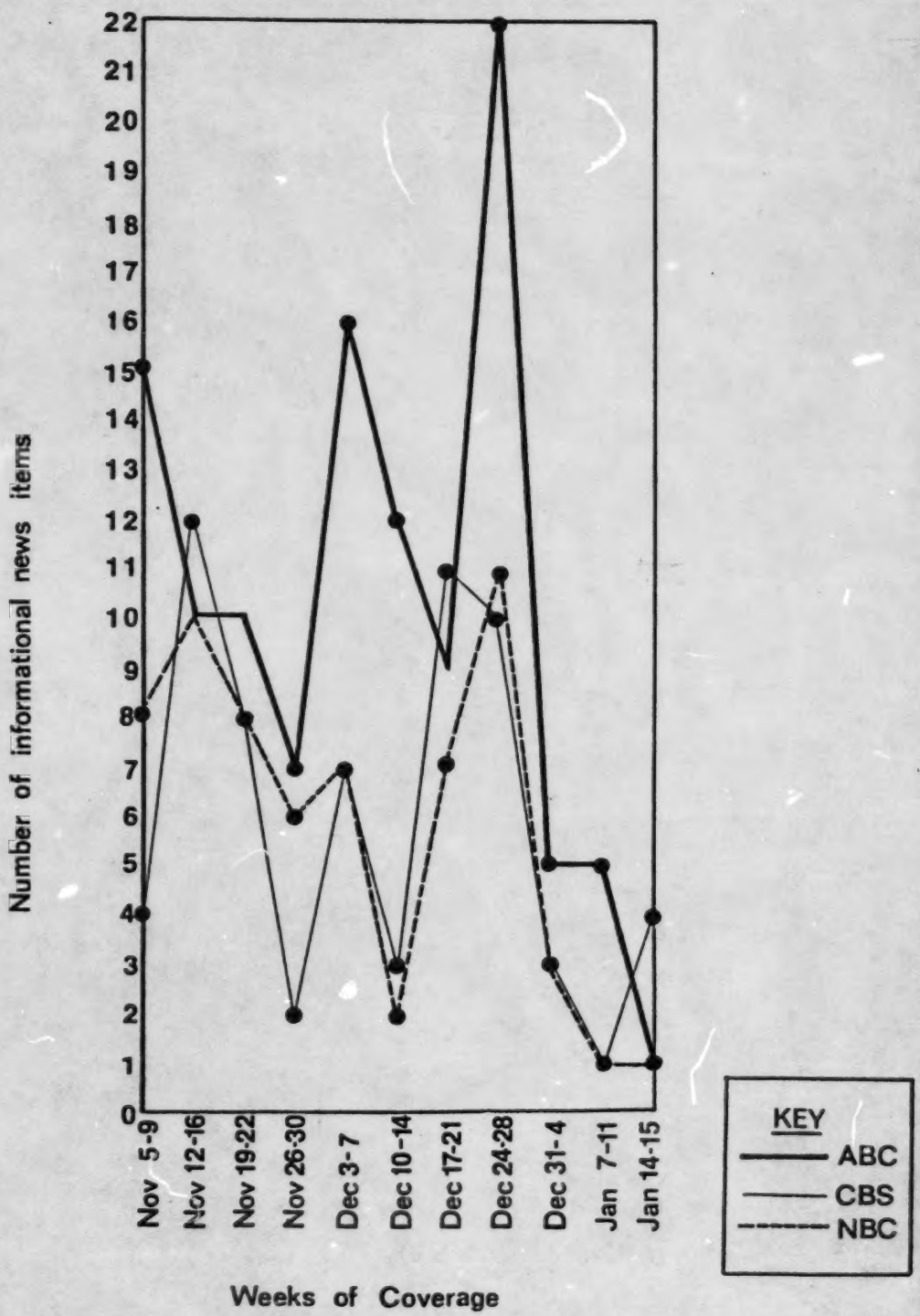
DATE	ABC		CBS		NBC	
Jan. 7	Peter Jennings Bill Blakemore	:57 1:45			George Lewis & John Cochran	1:14*
Jan. 8	Peter Jennings	:58	Liz Trotta	2:38	John Cochran & Ike Seamans	1:13*
Jan. 9						
Jan. 10	Bob Dyk	1:09	Bert Quint	:53	John Cochran & Ike Seamans	1:18*/**
Jan. 11	Bob Dyk	1:03			George Lewis & John Cochran	1:06*
Jan. 14	Bob Dyk	1:38	Bert Quint	2:04	Jim Bitterman George Lewis & John Cochran	:40 1:05*/**
Jan. 15		2:00#		1:29+		

#Audio report only

+Audio report only

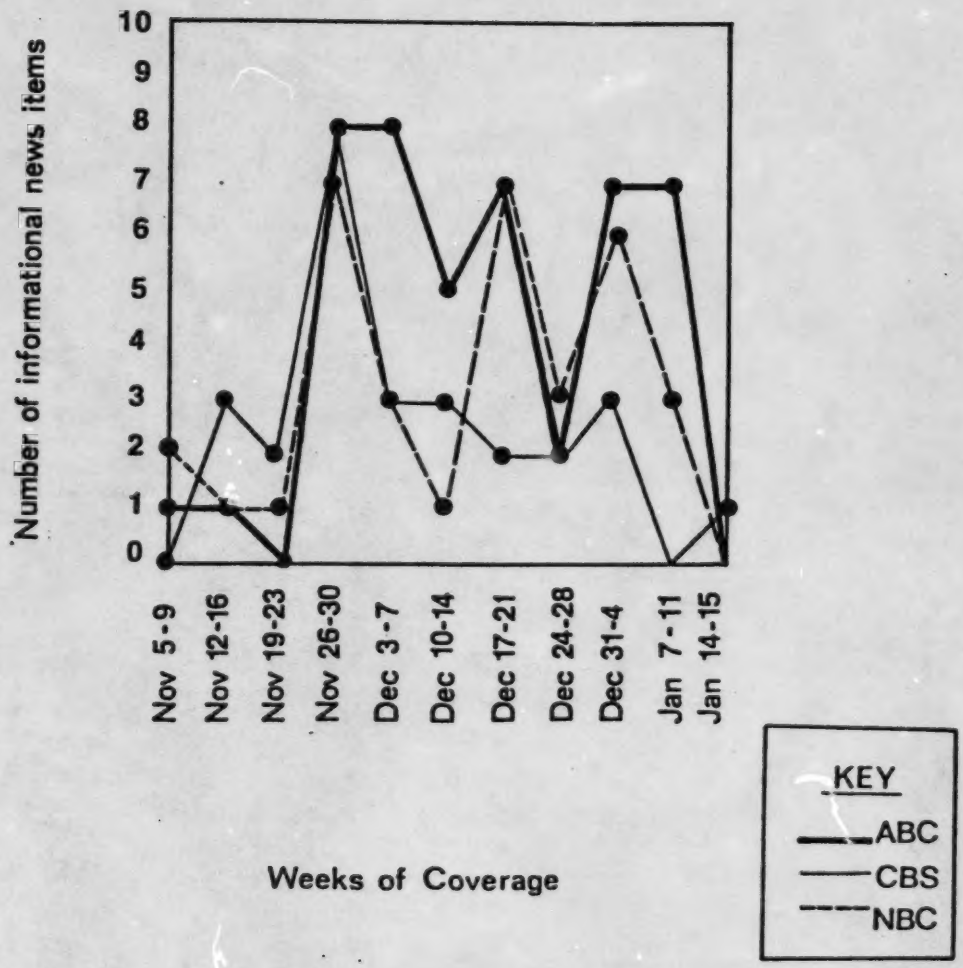
*Iran Diary
**Audio report only

FIGURE 1
EMBASSY TAKEOVER



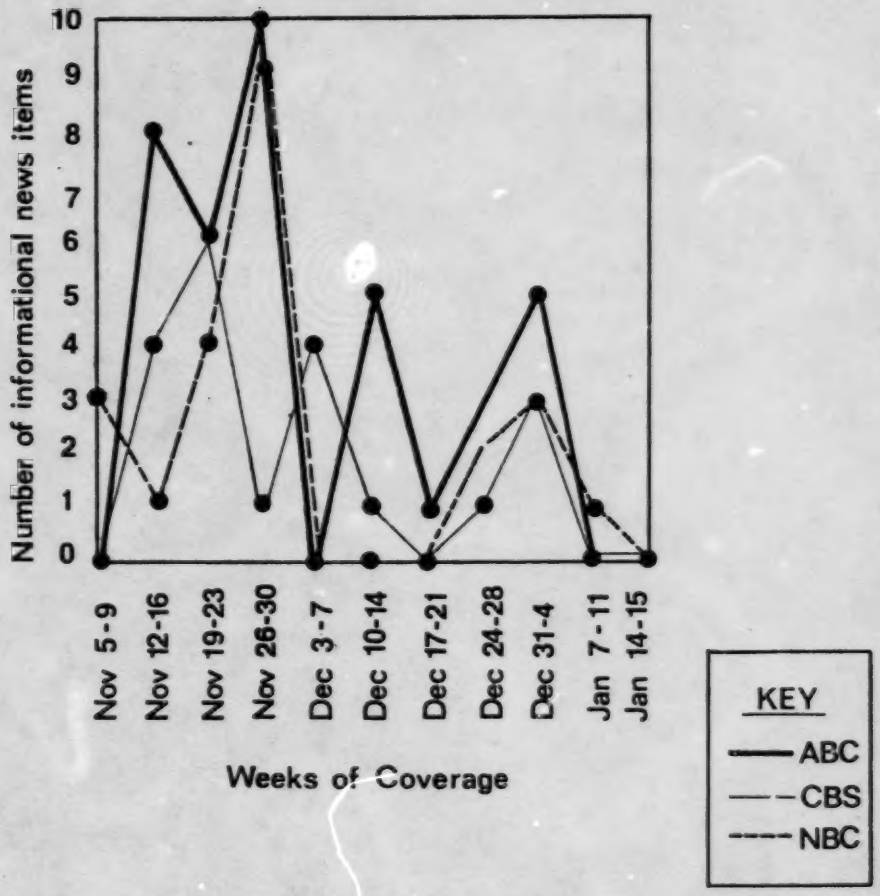
A comparison of the number of informational news items covered each week in the category of Embassy Takeover by ABC, CBS, and NBC.

FIGURE 2
IRANIAN INTERNAL AFFAIRS



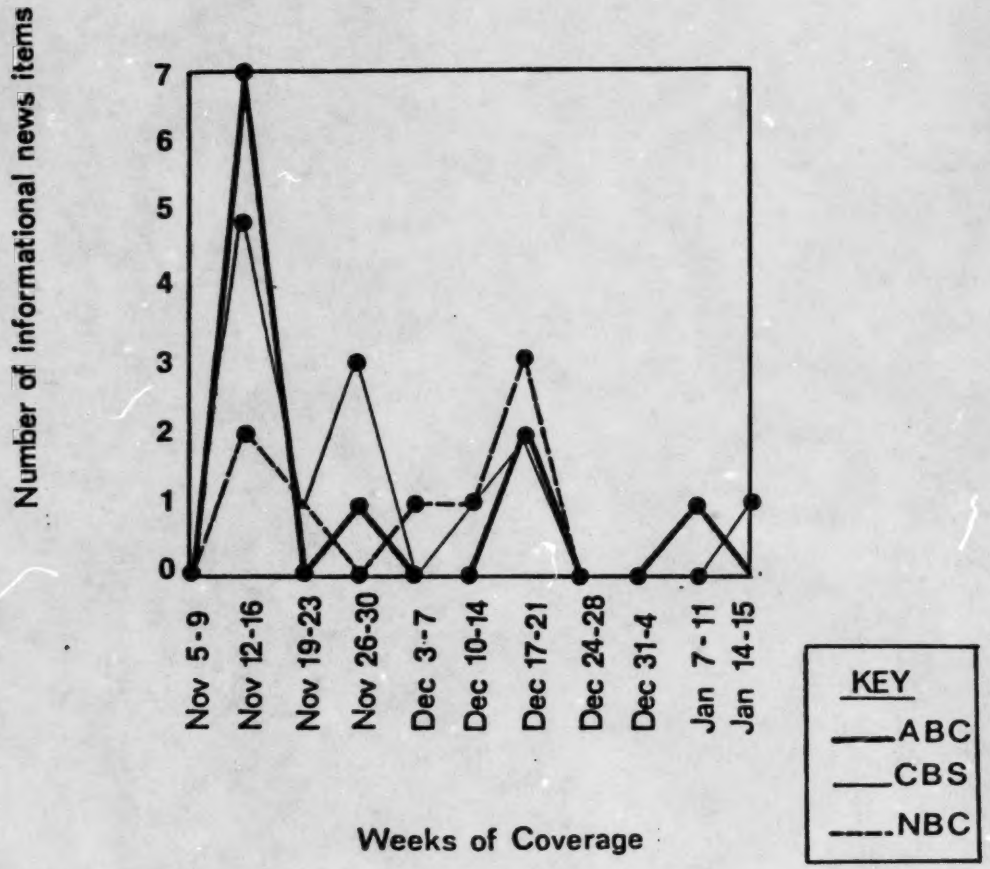
A comparison of the number of informational news items covered each week in the category of Iranian Internal Affairs by ABC, CBS, and NBC.

FIGURE 3
FOREIGN AFFAIRS



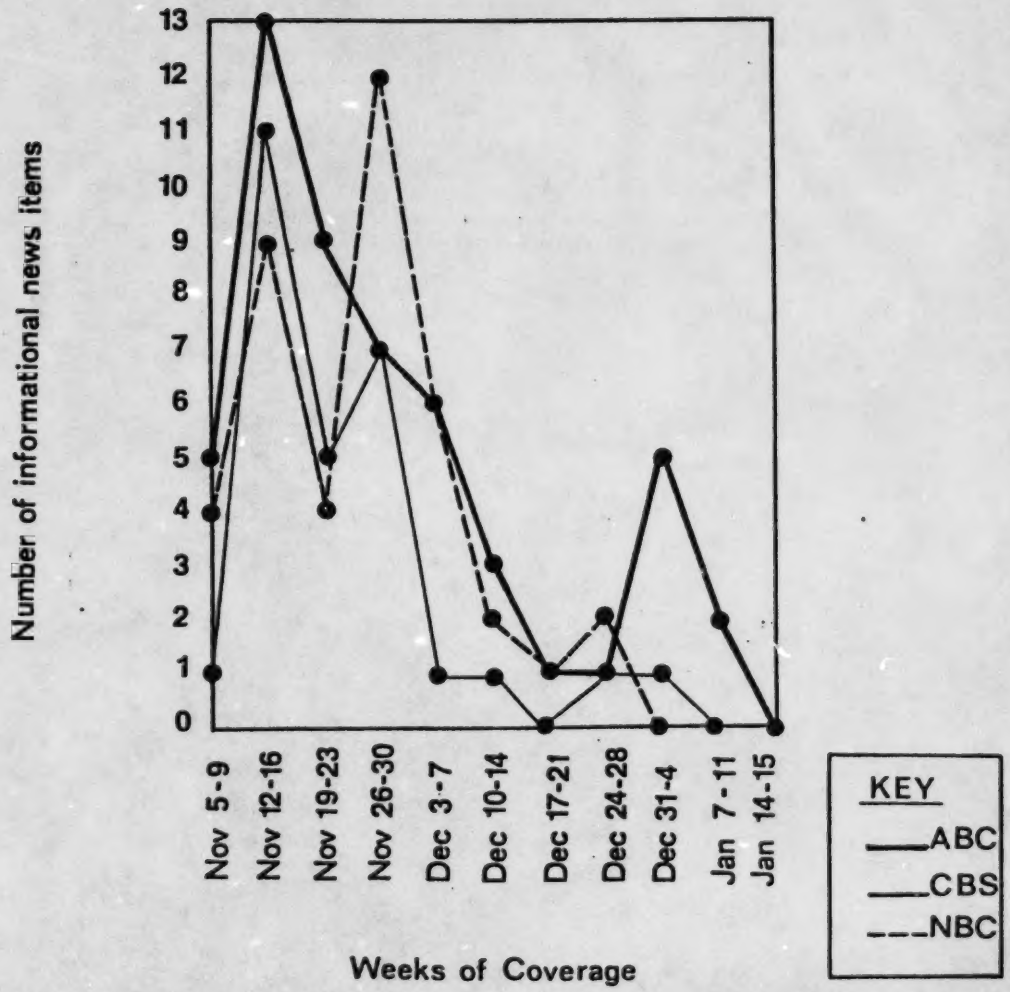
A comparison of the number of informational news items covered each week in the category of Foreign Affairs by ABC, CBS, and NBC.

FIGURE 4
ECONOMIC CONDITIONS



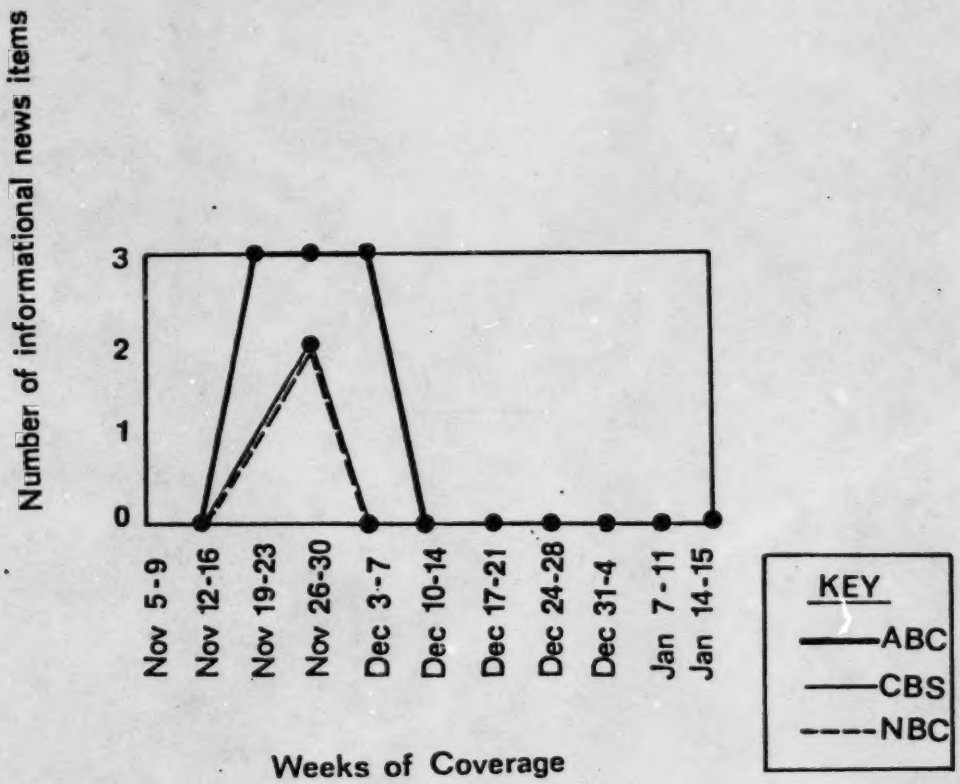
A comparison of the number of informational news items covered each week in the category of Economic Conditions by ABC, CBS, and NBC.

FIGURE 5
IRANIAN SOCIETY AND ITS PEOPLE



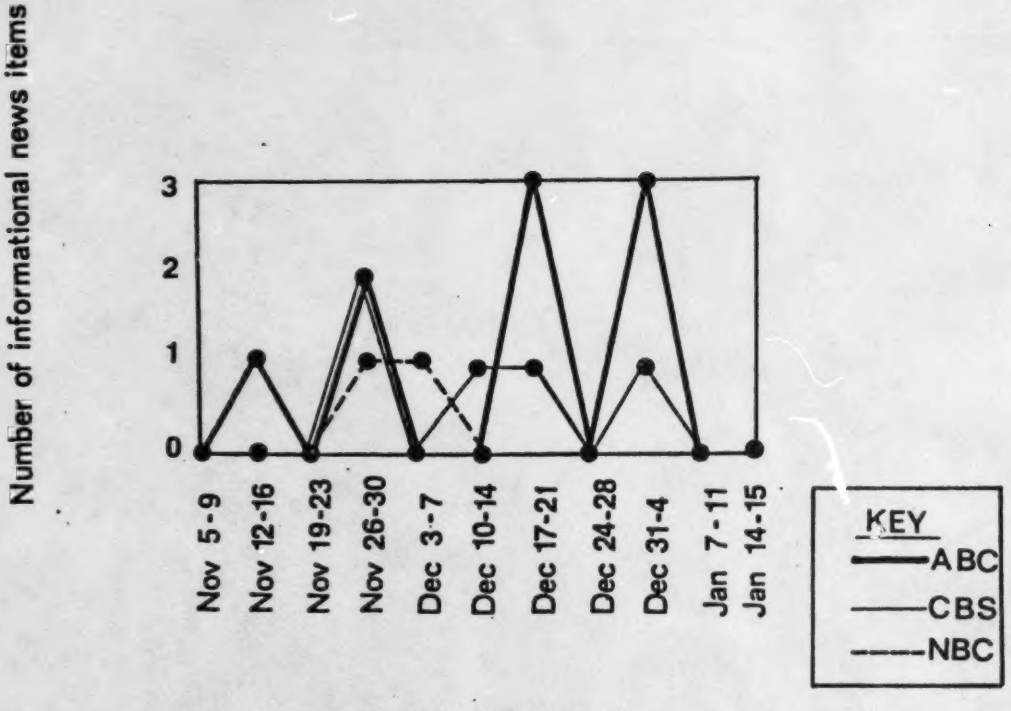
A comparison of the number of informational news items covered each week in the category of Iranian Society by ABC, CBS, and NBC.

FIGURE 6
ISLAMIC RELIGION



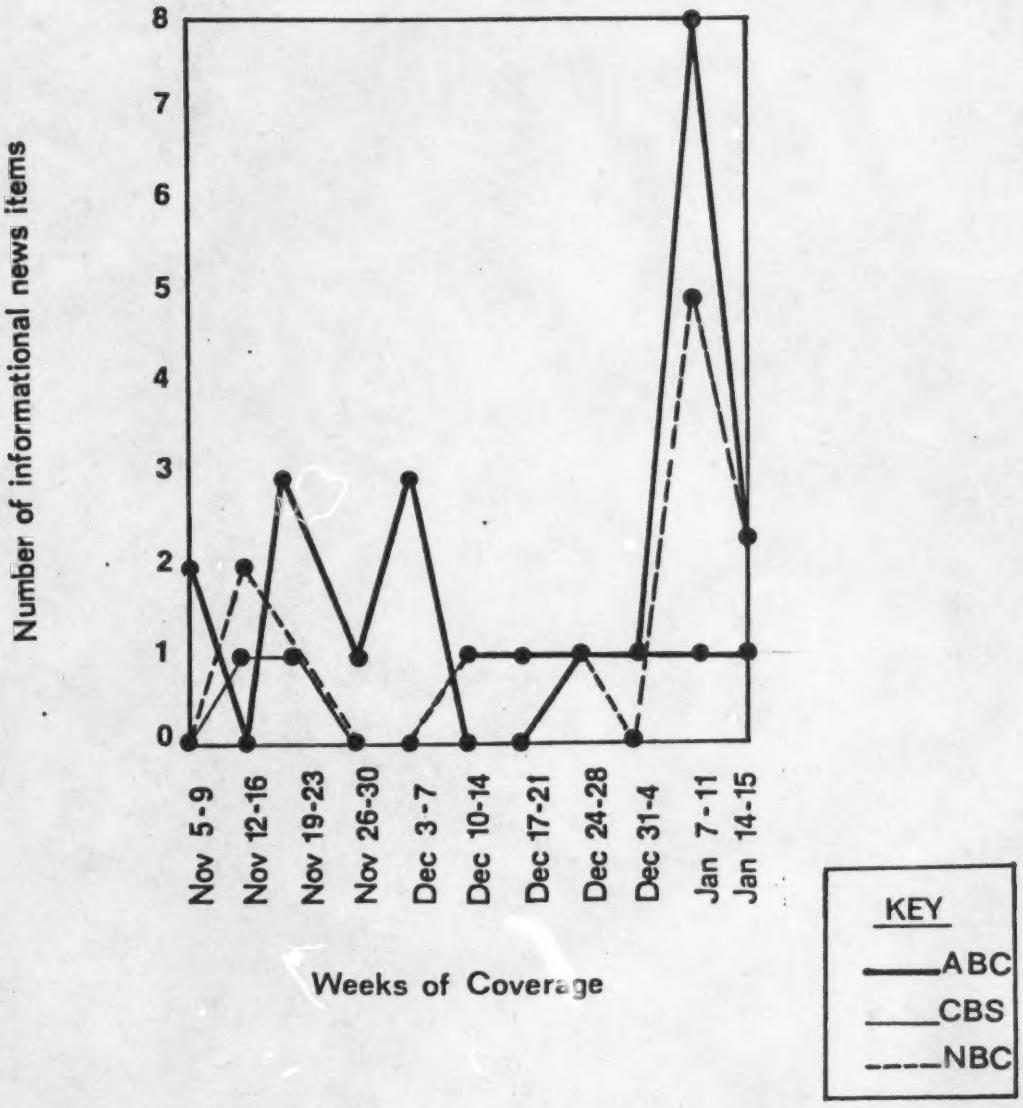
A comparison of the number of informational news items covered each week in the category of Islamic Religion by ABC, CBS, and NBC.

FIGURE 7
PROMINENT INDIVIDUALS



A comparison of the number of informational news items covered each week in the category of Prominent Individuals by ABC, CBS, and NBC.

FIGURE 8
OUTSIDE FACTORS AFFECTING IRAN



A comparison of the number of informational news items covered each week in the category of Outside Factors Affecting Iran by ABC, CBS, and NBC.

ENDNOTES

[1]Stephen Banker, "Beware of TV's Scoops," Panaroma, January 1981, p. 37.

[2]"How Things Stand Among the Networks After the May Sweeps and Before the Fall Wars," Broadcasting, July 13, 1981, p. 27.

[3]"TV Update," TV Guide, September 26, 1981, p. A-1.

[4]Carolyn Lewis, "Three Mile Island," in The Eye of the Storm, ed. Marvin Barrett and Zachary Sklar (New York: Lippincott and Crowell, 1980), p. 189.

[5]"A Helpless Giant in Iran," Newsweek, November 19, 1979, p. 62.

[6]Robert Shaplen, "Eye of the Storm," The New Yorker, June 2, 1980, p. 43.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Transcribed from "NBC's Nightly News", January 15, 1980, Vanderbilt News Archives, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

[9]Herbert J. Gans, Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time, (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 3.

[10]Marci McDonald, "All the News That's Fit to Bend," Maclean, March 3, 1980, p. 52.

[11]Charles E. Reichardt and Thomas D. Cook, "Beyond Qualitative Versus Quantitative Methods," in Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Evaluation Research, ed. Thomas Cook and Charles E. Reichardt, Vol E (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979), p. 8.

[12]R. Erickson, "Some Approaches to Injury in School Community Ethnography," Anthropology and Education Quarterly, Vol 8, 1977, p. 61.

[13]William J. Filstead, "Qualitative Methods: A Needed Perspective in Evaluation Research," in Cook and Reichardt, p. 37.

[14]Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, (New York: Aldine Publishing Co., 1967), p. 24.

[15]Although Tehran was the site of the Islamic Revolutionary Council and the official ruling government, the Ayatollah Khomeini lived and ruled from Qom.

[16]"Iran Drafts Code for Reporters," The New York Times, 3 July 1979, p. A-3.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid.

[19]"U.S. Regrets Expulsion," The New York Times, 24 July 1979, p. A-6.

[20]"New Press Code Adopted by Iran Limits Foreign Reporters' Words," The New York Times, 24 July 1979, p. A-1.

[21]In early 1979, Roone Arledge, President of ABC News and Sports, informed all ABC foreign correspondents and producers, routinely assigned to cover areas of the world where visas might be difficult to obtain in a crisis situation, to apply for visas immediately. Iran was one such country that Arledge thought might be a potential trouble area in the months to come. When the takeover did occur on November 4, ABC vice president for news in Europe, William Mildyke remarked: "We made the right decision to go ahead immediately and do it. It was a matter of luck, visas, and timing."

[22]"Jurists Group Deplore Iran's Press Crackdown," The New York Times, 15 August 1979, p. A-9.

[23]"Iran Shuts AP Operation," The New York Times, 5 September 1979, p. 4.

[24]Ibid.

[25]"Iran Expels Reporter, 15th in Two Months," The New York Times, 6 September 1979, p. A-3.

[26]U.S. Congress, Nouse, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Chronologies of Major Developments in Selected Areas of Foreign Areas (Iran), Cumulative Edition 1979, p. 111.

[27]"Bob Dyk: Giving ABC a Leg-Up in Iran Coverage," Broadcasting, January 7, 1980, p. 96.

[28]Ibid.

[29]"Tehran's Reluctant Diplomats," Time, December 3, 1979, p. 67.

[30] "Insider," Broadcasting, November 12, 1979, p. 33.

[31]A religious ceremony commemorating the death of Hosseini's son.

[32]"TV Update," TV Guide, November 24, 1979, p. A-3.